

Winter 2002



WOMEN INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC) PROGRAM

Directions Newsletter

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Revitalizing Quality Nutrition Services in WIC

By Anne Bartholomew

In a previous *Directions* newsletter, "Revitalizing Quality Nutrition Services in WIC (RQNS)" was introduced as a process of continuous program improvement for better customer service. The term customer includes not only WIC participants, but also the staff at all levels of WIC that provide service to participants. There are two outstanding RQNS activities that I would like to highlight.

First, the year and a half endeavor by the Food and Nutrition Service and the National WIC Association to update the 1988 *Nutrition Services Standards* has been completed. The updated *Nutrition Services Standards* will provide a way for all WIC State and local agencies to self-assess how well they deliver a wide range of nutrition services and how to improve the delivery and quality of nutrition services in their WIC Program. The 21 standards also represent the wide range of performance practices generally used in the delivery of quality WIC nutrition services. Therefore, they address not only what WIC offers its participants, but also how WIC offers these services. The *Nutrition Services Standards* have been sent to all WIC State and local agencies. The document will also be available electronically on the WIC Works Resource System, which is the second

highlighted activity.

The WIC Works Resource System continues to grow! FNS has partnered with the Food and Nutrition Information System to provide nutrition services tools for WIC State and local agency staff through the internet. Recent additions to the site include a database of nutrition education resources such as audiovisuals, client handouts, materials to borrow, and WIC Topics A – Z that contain important links to other health-related information such as conferences and grant announcements. The features of the site are: 1) WIC-Talk, an online discussion forum 2) WIC Sharing Center, where State-developed materials are shared 3) WIC Learning Center, the spot where WIC staff can improve their nutrition services skills and 4) WIC Research Center, which connects to reports and publications.



RISC – Y BUSINESS

By Donna Hines

Unfortunately, this article has nothing to do with **Tom Cruise** playing air guitar in his underwear. (It's a nice picture to have in your mind, though, isn't it?) Also, rather unfortunately, it has come to our attention that the WIC community at large is probably more familiar with Tom Cruise (fully or partially clothed) than it may be with the existence of the Risk Identification and Selection Collaborative, generally known as RISC, and the very important contribution this group makes toward keeping the WIC Program up to date and responsive to the public health issues and concerns we face every day. This article will introduce you to RISC, give you an idea of the type of work the group has done over the past few years, and hopefully enable you to appreciate RISC as a valuable tool in the development of WIC nutrition risk policy.

Background

Since the inception of the WIC Program, Federal policy permitted State agencies to develop nutrition risk criteria within broad Federal parameters for use in their local programs. As a result, criteria used to determine nutrition risk eligibility for WIC varied widely among WIC State agencies. Over the years, there has been considerable interest in and concern about this variation. In 1989, Congress required USDA to conduct a review of risk criteria and the priority system designed to ensure that WIC benefits are targeted to those most in need of them in the event that funds are not available to serve everyone who applies and is deemed eligible for WIC. With continued concern about the variation among States, in 1993 USDA awarded a grant to the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine (IOM) to undertake a comprehensive independent review of most (but not all) of the nutrition risk criteria being used by WIC State agencies at that time.

In 1996, IOM released its study results in a report entitled "*WIC Nutrition Risk Criteria: A Scientific Assessment*." This report included a detailed review of the literature underlying each studied risk criterion, along with the Expert Committee's recommendations concerning each criterion. It also identified areas in which further research was needed, or where better measurement tools need to be developed to identify individuals at risk in a public health setting. The IOM report gave the WIC community a starting point to use in strengthening an already successful public health nutrition program.

Following the publication of the IOM report, the National Association of WIC Directors/National WIC Association (NAWD/NWA) and FNS established a collaborative partnership to address the issues and recommendations of the IOM report, and to develop an action plan to achieve greater consistency among State agencies in the use and application of sound and appropriate nutrition risk criteria. The Workgroup consisted of NAWD/NWA-appointed State and local agency administrators and nutritionists as well as research, nutrition, and policy specialists from FNS, and made every effort to involve the larger WIC community (i.e., State and local agencies) as often as possible. The NAWD-NWA/FNS workgroup anticipated the need for future work on numerous unresolved issues related to nutrition risk criteria as well as on future issues arising out of emerging scientific information and trends. Thus, the Risk Identification and Selection Collaborative (RISC) was created by mutual agreement to manage the transition from this initial effort to an ongoing review process.

What is RISC, exactly?

As mentioned above, RISC was established in 1997 by the NAWD-NWA/FNS Workgroup as the primary vehicle for a comprehensive and ongoing system through which nutrition risk criteria can be proposed, reviewed, recommended for approval, and maintained for use in the WIC Program.

Thus RISC promotes the ongoing development of appropriate nutrition risk criteria for consistent application in the WIC Program in recognition of emergent science. RISC tries to keep WIC on the

application in the WIC Program in recognition of emergent science. RISC tries to keep WIC on the “cutting edge” of nutritional science, particularly as it applies to low-income women, infants and children. RISC has three major responsibilities:

- To evaluate existing and proposed nutrition risk criteria using current and emerging research and established guidelines, and provide the results to USDA officials for policy determination;
- To identify research needs related to nutrition risk, and provide the results to USDA policy officials; and
- To define the scope of future external reviews of nutrition risks, and share this scope with USDA policy officials.

In short, RISC is responsible for helping USDA make informed decisions regarding nutrition risk policy in the WIC Program.

Who is RISC?

RISC consists of 10 voting members with 5 representatives from FNS and 5 representatives from NAWD/NWA. Each entity also has one permanent proxy member who attends all RISC meetings and participates in RISC conference calls. Chairmanship of RISC alternates between FNS and NAWD/NWA on an annual basis; FNS currently serves as Chair. A complete roster of RISC members, including proxies, is available from the WIC website, at <http://www.usda.fns.gov/wic>.

What has RISC done for me lately?

RISC generally meets once a year to review and deliberate nutrition risk criteria for the WIC Program. During the course of the year, a great deal of work is accomplished through periodic conference calls, usually held every 4-6 weeks.

Since its first formal meeting in April 1998, RISC has completed assessments of 26 individual criteria. Some of these criteria (including nulliparity, rapid growth, and excessive caffeine consumption) were identified by IOM in 1996 as needing further review; others, such as passive smoking, foster care, and consumption of fish from water contaminated with toxic substances, were submitted with formal requests for review. Still others, including low hematocrit/low hemoglobin and the entire set of anthropometric risk criteria, were reviewed and revised in response to newly published scientific information such as the Body Mass Index (BMI) recommendations issued by CDC in 2000 for children and adults.

RISC also assisted in the development of the Statement of Work for the USDA-commissioned Study of WIC dietary risk assessments by the IOM, and participated in the open sessions of the Expert Committee convened by IOM for this study. Once the results of this study are released, RISC will take the lead in developing an action plan for evaluating and possibly implementing any recommendations that the study may produce. As the number of specific requests for proposed criteria reviews has diminished, RISC has moved into a broader scope of work. Recognizing that even the published definitive literature available to the IOM Expert Committee for the 1996 report may have been supplemented (or superseded) by newer material, RISC has recently begun to evaluate the references for the existing body of nutrition risk criteria that are allowed for use in WIC eligibility determinations. The group is also working closely with another NAWD-NWA/FNS workgroup that is examining the minimum and supplemental data sets used to produce the biennial WIC Program and Participant Characteristics (PC) Report, and developed the survey questions pertaining to nutrition risk as part of that effort.

Tell Me More!

For further information about RISC, or if you have a nutrition risk criterion to propose for consideration and review, feel free to contact Donna Hines, the current RISC Chairperson, or any of the RISC members. Donna can be reached at FNS, (703) 305-2714, or at donna.hines@fns.usda.gov.



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First National Summit on Nutrition, Breastfeeding & Cultural Competency: Eliminating Racial Disparities in Health ~ April 4-6, 2001

By Delores Stewart

The Mid-Atlantic Region, FNS, in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services held the first summit in the nation to address the impact of nutrition and breastfeeding on the elimination of racial disparities in health.

The goal of the summit was to facilitate the elimination of racial, ethnic, and economic disparities in health through culturally and linguistically responsive nutrition and breastfeeding promotion. FNS' priorities for breastfeeding promotion and support, revitalizing quality nutrition services, and improving program access and services to diverse populations as well as the goals outlined in Healthy People 2010 and the "HHS Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding" were integrated into conference goals.

Approximately 450 people from across the nation attended the conference to address this crucial issue.

Attendees came from USDA, Office of Minority Health, Office of Civil Rights, HHS, National Institutes of Health, Office on Women's Health, major academic institutions, hospitals, faith and community-based organizations, professional organizations, AAP, the Association of Black Cardiologists, the National Center for Cultural Competence, and private corporations.

Prestigious speakers and national experts in cultural competency discussed dietary and nutritional factors that underlie many conditions that contribute to the health disparities among cultures, including infant mortality, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancers, diseases, and health problems.

This summit culminated with attendees and stakeholders collaborating to develop action plans for states and other entities to influence change in policy, programs, and ad-

ministrative activities. The forum provided opportunities for networking, mentoring, and recruitment for individuals from diverse communities into the fields of nutrition and breastfeeding. The outcome of this process will produce measurable objectives with a two-year evaluation period. The events of the summit should be available on the internet, CD-ROM, and on videotape.



WSCA Expands, then Contracts (with Mead Johnson)

By Mike Drew

Effective October 1, 2001, the Western States Contracting Alliance (WSCA) implemented a new three-year infant formula rebate contract (through September 30, 2004) with Mead Johnson. Fifteen WIC State agencies represented by WSCA had been under contract with Mead Johnson the previous six years--since October 1995--based on a standard three-year contract and three extensions. For the next contract phase, six more WIC States have joined on with WSCA: Kansas, Maryland, District of Columbia, West Virginia, Delaware and Virgin Islands, bringing the current number to twenty-one.

The winning bid from Mead Johnson was for a \$2.83 rebate, or net cost of 11 cents, per can of 13-ounce milk based liquid concentrate, a decrease in cost from the previous contract and below the national average. FNS applauds the Washington State WIC Program for initiating and leading the WSCA infant formula procurement since 1993. The group procurement strategy is especially beneficial to the smaller States and ITO's who are able to benefit from group purchasing power in getting a higher rebate per can.

Infant Formula Rebate Contracts Awarded Under New Rebate Requirements

by Linda Clarke

A new regulation was implemented November 21, 2000 addressing infant formula rebate contract requirements and new medical documentation procedures for issuing non-contract infant formula. Below is a listing of rebate contracts that were awarded in accordance with the new requirements. To comply with the new rebate contract requirements, bids were requested for milk-based infant formula suitable for the routine issuance to the majority of generally healthy infants. Although bids were requested for milk-based infant formula only, the contracts require a rebate on the winning bidder's infant formula product line (excluding exempt infant formulas). The rebate to be paid for all other infant formula must equal the same percentage discount on the manufacturers' wholesale price as the corresponding physical form of milk-based infant formula for which a bid was submitted.

State Agency/Contract	Milk-Based Rebate	Net Cost	% Discount on Wholesale Price
Wisconsin <i>Effective Date</i> -- January 1, 2001, <i>Manufacturer</i> -- Ross			
	Liquid Concentrate	\$2.81	\$0.10 97%
	Powdered (14.1 oz.)	\$9.403	\$0.877 91%
	Ready-to-Feed	\$2.55	\$1.69 60%
Illinois <i>Effective Date</i> -- February 1, 2001, <i>Manufacturer</i> -- Ross			
	Liquid Concentrate	\$2.829	\$0.081 97%
	Powdered (14.1 oz.)	\$9.552	\$0.728 93%
	Ready-to-Feed	\$2.550	\$1.690 60%
Virginia <i>Effective Date</i> -- June 29, 2001, <i>Manufacturer</i> -- Carnation			
	Liquid Concentrate	\$2.28	\$0.670 97%
	Powdered (12 oz.)	\$6.49	\$0.753 90%
	Ready-to-Feed	\$3.35	\$0.172 95%
North Dakota <i>Effective Date</i> -- July 1, 2001, <i>Manufacturer</i> -- Carnation			
	Liquid Concentrate	\$1.821	\$0.529 78%
	Powdered (12 oz.)	\$5.632	\$1.608 78%
	Ready-to-Feed	\$2.687	\$0.833 76%
Kentucky <i>Effective Date</i> -- July 1, 2001, <i>Manufacturer</i> -- Carnation			
	Liquid Concentrate	\$2.2008	\$0.1492 94%
	Powdered (12 oz.)	\$6.6317	\$0.6083 92%
	Ready-to-Feed	\$3.0700	\$0.4500 87%
<i>(composite rebate for milk & soy-based)</i>			
Western States Contracting Alliance (WSCA), <i>Effective Date</i> -- October 1, 2001, <i>Manufacturer</i> -- Mead Johnson			
(Alaska, Am. Samoa, Arizona, Delaware, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Virgin Islands, Washington, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, Wyoming, ITC/AZ, ITC/NV, Navajo/AZ)			
	Liquid Concentrate	\$ 2.83	\$0.110 96%
	Powdered (16 oz.)	\$10.86	\$0.500 96%
	Ready-to-Feed	\$ 3.90	\$0.200 95%
Michigan <i>Effective Date</i> -- November 1, 2001, <i>Manufacturer</i> -- Ross			
	Liquid Concentrate	\$2.95	\$0.09 97%
	Powdered (14.1 oz.)	\$9.75	\$0.82 92%
	Ready-to-Feed	\$1.50	\$2.90 34%
Potawatomi Nation, OK <i>Effective Date</i> — November 1, 2001, <i>Manufacturer</i> —Ross			
	Liquid Concentrate	\$2.42	\$0.62 80%
	Powdered (14.1)	\$7.98	\$2.59 75%
	Ready-to-Feed	\$0	\$0 0%
Florida <i>Effective Date</i> —February 1, 2002, <i>Manufacturer</i> —Carnation			
	Liquid Concentrate	\$2.2833	\$0.0667 97%
	Powdered (12 oz.)	\$6.655	\$0.585 92%
	Ready-to-Feed	\$3.35	\$0.17 95%

Texas and New Mexico Joint EBT Project Moves Forward

by Mary Alice Winfree and Gene Austin

The New Mexico and Texas WIC Programs continue to make progress in the joint development of a WIC electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system. The States' EBT system is a combination of contractor support and in-house development. TX and NM released a joint request for proposal (RFP) resulting in the selection of GovConnect as the "card integration" contractor for card and retailer point-of-sale (POS) software development. Texas has developed the retailer settlement data format that enables each state to process its retailer EBT transactions. Texas and New Mexico will be the first States in the Nation to test in-State EBT processing, and to process interstate retail transactions electronically.

New Mexico plans to launch their pilot in February 2002, and Texas 3 to 6 months after the NM pilot has commenced operations. Initially, pilots will be

conducted in Truth or Consequences, NM and El Paso, TX, and will test the feasibility of expanding the systems into other areas of the States. TX and NM are utilizing hybrid card technology – a combination integrated circuit chip (smart card) and magnetic stripe card – to allow client access to three vital nutrition assistance and social programs: WIC, Food Stamps, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.



WIC Functional Requirements Document for a Model Automated System

By Laurie Hickerson

FNS contracted with Phoenix Maximus to update the 1990 Functional Requirements Document (FRED) to include Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT). The draft produced by Maximus was shared with all State agencies for review and comment. Subsequently, FNS staff, in consultation with Maximus, have been making revisions to the document to address the many (nearly 900) comments received. Revisions to the introduction, overview and certification sections have been completed thus far.

The most significant changes are:

- Core functions established by the MIS Workgroup will be required and are italicized throughout the document.
- FNS will be reviewing Advanced Planning Documents (APD's) to ensure the required functions are included when systems are being developed. If certain required functions cannot be achieved, State agencies should document in the APD the reason the function will not be automated.
- FNS regional offices will review systems during management evaluations and discuss a plan for achieving required functions that have not yet been incorporated.
- Levels of functionality have been defined. State agencies will achieve functionality as funds permit.
- Functions have been added to address new regulatory requirements such as documentation of income, residence and identity, bloodwork, race/ethnicity, presumptive eligibility and temporary eligibility.
- Two separate documents will be made available on FNS' website. FRED will be available for State agencies interested in MIS; FRED-E will be available for State agencies interested in EBT. The FRED document will be the same as FRED-E, without EBT functionality.

The next steps are to share these sections with Maximus, and other sections as they are completed, so that they can make revisions to the inputs, outputs, and processes. Our goal is to complete FRED by the end of fiscal year 2002 or sooner if possible and to make FRED and FRED-E available on the FNS website.

"It's in the STARs"

By Jolie Carey

During the summer of 2001, a team was formed of regional office and headquarters staff to look at WIC's management evaluation (ME) review tool, the State Technical Assistance Review (STAR) Guide. This team, called the STAR Umbrella Group, was tasked with writing directions on how the STAR Guide should be revised and updated. The STAR Umbrella Group plans to have this guidance, "Directions and Guidelines for Revising the STAR Guide", finalized by February 2002. Following the issuance of this document, multiple teams consisting of regional office and headquarters staff will be formed to work on revising, standardizing and updating the various functional area sections of the STAR Guide. Thus, eleven different teams will be formed to revise the sections of the STAR Guide. These teams may exist simultaneously. The STAR Guide is one of the many activities WIC is working on to improve our management evaluation process.

MARO Management Information System Coordinators Share Lessons at Recent Meeting

By Roxanne Robinson

During a two day meeting coordinated by MARO Supplemental Foods Program staff, WIC Management Information Coordinators, State Directors, and Program staff met to discuss the management information system (MIS) approval process, system technology and share lessons learned. A list of 23 lessons was compiled over the course of the meeting. The lessons include advice such as: ride herd over contractors, triage help desk calls, don't make food instruments busy, keep in mind the need and ease of future changes, test scripts are critical, and ad hoc reporting is a must have.

Roxanne Robinson of MARO SFP led the meeting with a discussion of the MIS approval process. The Region shared its guidance on "When to Submit MIS Related Documents to MARO and the prototype advance planning document budgets which were developed as a License to Improve joint effort between MARO and MPRO. (The budgets were noted in a previous edition of *Directions*.) Laurie Hickerson, of SFPD provided a preview of coming events for the attendees, and Linda Shelden of MARO's IT staff addressed Internet and Intranet security.

States that just completed implementing a new MIS, as well as States just entering the MIS development arena, remarked that the meeting provided useful pointers and suggestions for future MIS activity. The meeting evaluations were all extremely positive with comments ranging from "benefited a lot" to "everything covered was informative. Useful forum for exchange of information."



Conference on Technology and Program Integrity

By Laurie Hickerson

The National WIC Association sponsored a national WIC technology and program integrity conference December 1-5, 2001, in San Diego, California. The conference was attended by WIC State and local agency directors and their staffs, systems contractors, Food and Nutrition Service managers and staff, as well as representatives from outside organizations such as the General Accounting Office. The conference began with a focus on current and future technology trends in WIC, followed by a second track of sessions dealing with program integrity challenges and solutions. The conference was well received by attendees and served to enhance the knowledge and skills of State agency staff working in these important program areas.

WIC on the Web

By Melanie Casey

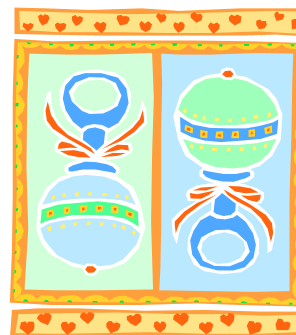
What is WIC's website address?

www.fns.usda.gov/wic

This site is maintained by the Food and Nutrition Service, with information targeted primarily for the public citizen, including students, advocates, and prospective participants.

There you will find:

- Directories of State agencies
- Income eligibility guidelines for WIC
- Information for participants on how to apply for WIC
- A USDA Fraud Hotline contact information.
- A Link to the WIC Works Resource System
- Links to FirstGov and Nutrition.Gov
- Information about Farmers Market Nutrition Programs
- Status report on WIC EBT projects
- A Link to the non-discrimination statements for our programs
- WIC grant levels for the year and the previous year
- Monthly WIC Food Cost Reports
- Reports and studies, including the Coordination Strategies Handbook and links to GAO reports and other reports pertaining to WIC
- Links to WIC and FMNP regulations
- Information about the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Pilot Program



Like all websites, the WIC website is a work in progress. We are working to provide more information for all our customers soon, including information about food package items and the effectiveness of WIC.

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What's the WIC Works Resource System? How is it different from the WIC website? It is

What is the WIC Works Resource System and how is it different from the WIC website?

The WIC Works Resource System is linked from the WIC website and vice versa. According to the Tufts University Nutrition Navigator, the highly respected Tufts University School of Nutrition Science and Policy, the WIC Works Resource System is rated "Among the Best," with a score of 23 out of 25. The online rating contains the following commentary: "This comprehensive site is a great tool that could maximize the effectiveness of WIC... WIC staff can exchange successful newsletters, in-service training presentations, and projects in the "Sharing Center." The "Learning Center" is categorized by WIC-relevant topics such as breastfeeding, food packages, counseling and education materials, and evaluation of services. "Topics A to Z" directs readers to links on food safety, grants, gestational diabetes, children with special needs, and more." Another feature is WIC-Talk, an email listserv which is administered by FNIC -- you can go to the WIC Works website and subscribe there. Members include people at local agencies and from advocate groups, NAWD, FNS, etc. Members post and receive emails from all other members, and there are archives of previous messages.



Again, enjoy 2002 and we hope to hear about all the great things you and your staff are planning! ~ WIC HQ